

The Effectiveness of Intersectional Political Science Pedagogy in an Introductory Course in American Public Policy

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The current study seeks to confront the challenge of incorporating the role of inequality, identity, and intersectionality into political science teaching and learning. Integrating student-centered political science pedagogy, we examine the effectiveness of an intersectional exploration of American public policy. Intersectional political science pedagogy emphasizes the importance of *multiple intersecting identities, power, inclusiveness, and equality* (Rasmussen, 2014). Does integrating the four key features of intersectional political science pedagogy along with an anti-oppressive approach impact how and what different students learn about public policy? In this quasi-experimental design, we explore the variation in learning in two introductory courses in public policy. The design and content were similar for both sections. Both had many of the same assignments centered around an introductory textbook - Thomas Dye's *Understanding Public Policy*. For the experimental section, we integrated intersectional political science pedagogy. In addition, this section employed a flipped classroom, introducing innovative approaches to grading and assessment that were accessible, inclusive, and anti-racist. In the control group section, the course was traditionally taught without supplemental material on intersectionality or the more innovative and unconventional pedagogy. We hypothesize that students enrolled in the intersectional section will have more interest and knowledge in public policy, as well as a deeper understanding of racial progress as it relates to the policy process. Moreover, we predict that students will display some resistance and discomfort when it comes to participating in class discussions.

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Teaching public policy courses using traditional political science pedagogy focusing on the policy process without exploring the implications of race, gender, and class is increasingly challenging. Increased demographic diversity across college and university campuses, the COVID-19 pandemic, and racial tensions throughout the country highlight the centrality of politics and public policy in the lives of everyday people. Political scientists face numerous challenges as the discipline identifies teaching methods and practices for responding to these questions. These issues also present opportunities as students attempt to understand social and political problems by studying political science. Adding to our challenges, attacks by policymakers and segments of the population aimed at educational practices that include histories of oppression, exclusion, and inequality may contribute to alienation, tension, and decreased classroom engagement. How can instructors teach introductory public policy courses using intersectional political science pedagogy?

During this past fall semester, we taught two sections of Introduction to American Public Policy (POSC 103). This is one of three core course requirements for the political science major and is usually taken in a student's first or second year. The course also attracts many nonmajors as it fulfills a general education requirement. We conducted an exploratory quasi-experimental design using a two-group post-test-only design. Our goal was to explore how an intersectional pedagogical approach impacts how students perceive learning about race and politics and whether such an approach leads to greater understanding and knowledge of American government and public policy. We test these assumptions within important social, political, and demographic contexts. As professors at a teaching-focused state university (a Predominantly White Institution PWI), our research occurred during the Fall Semester of 2022, during a wave of social and political backlash against “diversity” in education (Burgess et. al., 2001; McClain

et al., 2016). In this design, one of us taught an experimental section that included a wide array of material about race and other intersectional topics. The other professor taught the control group more traditionally, without focusing on race and intersectionality.

This study suggests that teaching public policy using intersectional political science pedagogy enhances critical thinking, student engagement, and understanding of inequality and oppression. The study demonstrates how *intersectional political science pedagogy* (Rasmussen 2014) can effectively be implemented and operationalized in an introductory public policy course. Focusing on inclusion and anti-oppressive course content, we confront the challenge of incorporating the role of race, gender, ethnicity, and inequality into public policy instruction. In public policy, recognizing the role of identity and inequality elucidate the practical implications of government action and helps students understand social disparities. Intersectional pedagogy requires instructors and students to move beyond reductive frameworks and essentialism, which examine identity as mere categories. Moreover, we present a framework guided by interdisciplinary instruction, exploring diverse topics and relevant histories for understanding American public policy.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) in Education

The social, political, and educational contexts of this work is relevant as it shapes the experiences of students and educators. The mission of the U.S. Department of Education promotes a commitment to student achievement and competitiveness in a global economy (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Diversity education is an essential aspect in the process of effectively achieving this mission. Critical examination of the lasting implications of racism, gender discrimination, and other forms of oppression has inspired efforts to promote diversity in hiring, admissions, and course content. What does this mean for students and educators in higher

education? Institutions have launched diversity-related recruitment efforts, hiring initiatives, training, workshops, and strategic plans. As these practices advance, interest in culturally responsive teaching and inclusive learning environments attempts to respond substantively to the needs of increasingly diverse student populations (e.g., Plaut, 2010a; Plaut, 2010b). These processes sometimes combine with broader institutional initiatives designed to promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)¹ (Burbules, 2021). The multi-level approach requires comprehensive assessment, investment, and lasting commitment to change oppressive educational structures. The purpose of DEI is to create the institutional change and equity that Civil Rights laws rooted in equality did not effectively secure for affected groups during the 1960s (Kelly et al., 2022). However, some scholars have criticized the implementation of DEI initiatives within organizations and institutions.

The critiques surrounding the language and practices of DEI posit that the goal of promoting increased diversity is well-intended. Still, the policies are often ineffective symbolic public relations tools (i.e., Jawaharlal, 2022). The argument suggests that organizations are feigning a commitment to DEI without dismantling oppressive systems and social structures (Iloh, 2022). Recognizing the complexity of identity and applying consequential rigorous analysis to end oppression, institutions must move beyond non-critical frameworks and integrate critical frames. This can be translated into practice throughout the social sciences by focusing on intersectionality in the classroom. Intersectionality is an accepted pedagogical practice throughout the social sciences. The theory provides a practical and parsimonious explanation for the complex operation of identity, social inequality, and oppression (i.e., Nash, 2008; Hankivsky

¹ The acronyms used to describe these initiatives and programs vary. This includes recent variations that focus more on the role of equity, Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion (EDI) Other adaptations of the acronym include Diversity & Inclusion (D&I), and Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, and Access (IDEA) (see. Kelly et al. 2022).

& Cormier, 2019). Integrating student-centered political science pedagogy, we examine the effectiveness of an intersectional exploration of American public policy.

Innovative and Unconventional Pedagogy in Political Science

Political science professors and instructors utilize many theories, methods, and practices to guide their teaching and instruction. These practices serve various purposes, generally linked to a course's learning objectives achieved through the facilitator's pedagogical approach. Introductory courses may have additional pedagogical underpinnings linked to the goals of a program, department, institutional socialization, preparation (writing expectations), and foundational knowledge. Our approach incorporating intersectional political science pedagogy within introductory public policy courses was based on these elements. We sought to incorporate inclusive anti-oppressive pedagogy, develop and facilitate innovative public policy courses driven by the training and experiences of the instructor, and achieve institutional goals.

Formally integrating intersectionality in political science as a pedagogical approach is guided by the literature and methods in many social science fields. In this regard, political scientists can draw inspiration and direction from scholars that examine similar topics and social problems (Rasmussen, 2014). Moreover, scholars within the field have developed a tradition of employing innovative and nontraditional pedagogical practices that benefit their students and the academic community. McGovern and Yacobucci (2021) examine the effects of nontraditional pedagogy in introductory political science courses taught using a multi-team approach. They limit course enrollment to political science majors, foregrounding the salience of analytical skills, research ability, and writing skills as primary goals of their pedagogy. They found that their political science major-only approach improved student learning outcomes in these areas,

and students were able to make meaningful connections between their learning and a "public concern" (p. 110).

Cooperman, et. al. (2016) use innovative pedagogical practices that focus on resistance and reframing how their students learn about the contributions of Black women activists during the Civil Rights Movement. By resisting dominant frames, these scholars broaden their students' understanding of Black women's Civil Rights figures beyond participation in bus boycotts. They demonstrate how rich, and in-depth re-examination of these histories can inform political and policy knowledge. Political scientists have also developed pedagogical approaches for teaching by applying theory developed in education (Tomlinson & Allan, 2000). Unconventional pedagogical approaches designed to respond to students' individual needs as they arise, known as differentiated learning, are also used in undergraduate political science courses (H. R. Ernst & T. L. Ernst, 2005). Other scholars teach about race, discrimination, and inequality by employing active learning simulations using *Monopoly*, *Ships*, and *Shoes* (Stout, V. Kretschmer, & Stout, C., 2016). These innovative pedagogies respond to the challenges of diverse student needs and begin to address the skepticism some students possess when learning about racism and inequality.

The Multicultural Approach

A related approach is multicultural education, which focuses on the interplay between identity and education. Multicultural education involves implementing the institutional changes necessary for all students to experience educational equality and success (Banks, 2013; Banks, 2013). Education and ethnic studies scholars have conceptualized multicultural education based on integrating content, knowledge construction, prejudice reduction, and equity pedagogy (Banks, 1993, p. 33). The history of racial, ethnic, cultural, exclusion and segregation led other

scholars to theorize about culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2002). "*Culturally Responsive Teaching* is defined as using the cultural characteristics, experiences, and perspectives of ethnically diverse students as conduits for teaching them more effectively" (Gay, 2002, p. 106). Like multicultural education, culturally responsive education is grounded in formalized theory and dimensions of evidence-based practice. Students benefit from pedagogy and course content that integrates the salience of their culture and lived experiences. Gay (2002) argued that ethnically diverse students would experience improved learning outcomes when educated through culturally inclusive pedagogy.

Interdisciplinary and social debates surrounding the role and value of multicultural education extend back to the late 1800s and the early ethnic studies movement (Banks, 1993). The emergence of theories and practices developed to address gaps in educational equity has followed the contours of public policy and social change. The desegregation movement and integration of educational institutions also received persistent resistance and backlash despite established legal precedence (e.g., *Brown v. Board of Education*). A similar backlash is occurring in response to *Culturally Responsive Teaching*, *Intersectionality*, and *Critical Race Theory*. While critical race theory is beyond the scope of this study, it is essential to note that many political pundits, media sources, and others have conflated the meaning and application of these terms. *Critical Race Theory* is a legal framework developed by Derrick Bell and other scholars of color used to analyze, interpret, and understand how race, racism, and White supremacy function throughout American society (Matsuda, 1991; Matsuda, 2018; Delgado & Stefancic, 2000; Solórzano, Villalpando, & Oseguera, 2005; Burnside & Fletcher, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 2020). While developed by legal and critical theorists, CRT is now an interdisciplinary framework applied by scholars and researchers in examining deeply entrenched racism in

institutions, systems, and practices. CRT captures the relevant and meaningful histories of racial oppression that shape modern education, including the racism and disparities that exist today. The political backlash against inclusive pedagogies and the integration of culturally relevant course content make it imperative that political science should incorporate "the character and implications of ethnic, gender, and cultural diversity" into "all relevant courses" (Wahlke, 1991, p. 53; Rasmussen, 2014).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is a knowledge project with epistemological origins in black feminism and 1970s activism advancing the racial integration of higher education (Collins, 1990; Collins, 2017; Collins & Bilge, 2020). In political science and public policy, intersectionality is increasingly deployed as a robust analytical framework and methodology (Hancock, 2007a; Hancock, 2007b; Hughes, 2011; Brown, 2013; Brown et al., 2021; Breslin, Pandey, & Riccucci, 2017; Hankivsky, & Cormier, 2019; Garcia, & Zajicek, 2022). Scholars conducting research in political science and the subfields generally use intersectionality to examine complex individual and group-level interactions within political institutions and government organizations. Intersectionality gives scholars the analytical tools necessary to explore multiple overlapping categories linked to identity and systems of oppression (Nash, 2008; Hankivsky & Cormier, 2019). However, the interdisciplinary nature of intersectionality in academia and its origins have contributed to inconsistent and evolving conceptualizations of the term (Gopaldas, 2013; Collins, 2017; Collins & Bilge, 2020). It is essential to acknowledge these origins when it comes to classroom instruction.

Despite the controversy surrounding critical examinations of identity and oppression, a standard list of core concepts, themes, and scholars are linked to intersectionality. For instance,

conceptualizations of intersectionality generally credit Crenshaw (1989;1991) as the scholar that introduced the theory within the academic literature. Crenshaw (1989) delivered an analysis that articulated the experience of marginalization and violence endured by black women in America. According to Crenshaw, black women were denied access to justice within the legal system and were frequently marginalized within the civil rights community. Systems of oppression linked to the intersections of race and gender left black women susceptible to multiple overlapping disadvantages. Crenshaw (1989) presented a theory that traveled from black feminists and activist movements into academia and across the disciplines. Collins and Bilge (2020) offer the following description:

"Intersectionality investigates how intersecting power relations influence social relations across diverse societies and individual experiences in everyday life. As an analytic tool, intersectionality views categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, nation, ability, ethnicity, and age – among others – as interrelated and mutually shaping one another. Intersectionality is a way of understanding and explaining complexity in the world, people, and human experiences" (p. 2).

Importantly, intersectionality provides a critical lens for understanding these challenges from the perspective of historically excluded and disadvantaged groups. Throughout the legal, black feminist, and policy literature, scholars recognize the structural and political dynamics that shape experiences of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Crenshaw, 2005; McCall, 2005; Hancock, 2007a; Collins, 2017; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Collins and Bilge (2020) argue that there are six core concepts associated with intersectionality (intersecting power relations, social context, complexity, relationality, social justice, and social inequality). For this study, we focus on the power of intersectionality as an analytic tool that combines inquiry and practice to inform intersectional political science pedagogy (Rasmussen, 2014; Collins & Bilge, 2020). Intersectional political science pedagogy emphasizes the importance of multiple intersecting

identities, power, inclusiveness, and equality (Rasmussen, 2014). As Rasmussen (2014) discussed, pedagogical approaches that include social inequality, race, gender, class, and other social identities within political science instruction are not uncommon. However, scholars and faculty members need access to empirical evidence to support their assumptions related to these practices. College and university classrooms are increasingly diverse, and students and faculty members represent various identity categories. Many of these identities are associated with social assumptions, stereotypes, and stigmas that impact how individuals experience the world and interact with others. Members of an academic community also possess multiple interrelated identities that contribute to the complexity of these interactions. As Rasmussen (2014) articulated, intersectional political science pedagogy centers on four key themes: a focus on multiple identities, power and process, inclusion, and a normative commitment to equality.

Applying Intersectionality to an Introductory Course in American Public Policy

Based on the framework for intersectional political science pedagogy presented by Rasmussen (2014), we examine student perceptions of inclusive instruction, critical thinking, engagement, and knowledge. Introduction to American Public Policy (POSC103) is a course developed to provide undergraduate students with a framework for exploring the foundational aspects of public policy, American government, and politics. The experimental section achieves this goal by exploring topics traditionally examined within public policy courses while incorporating intersectional analysis, supplemental assigned readings, and relevant political engagement events. The course teaches students about the "complex interconnected nature of systems of inequality" (Rasmussen, 2014, p. 104), examining the history of American public policy along the intersections of race, class, gender, ethnicity, and social inequality. This section

also focused on increased classroom engagement, inclusion, and open discussion driven by critique and analysis.

Challenges Faced by Professors and Students

Introductory courses are challenging for students unfamiliar with the norms and expectations of higher education. Students may feel uncertain about classroom engagement, sharing their opinions, and critiquing scholars. Despite these challenges, the potential benefits such as the development of critical thinking skills, are considerable. The current debates surrounding immigration, race, and police violence, for instance, were included in our classroom discussions. Students engaged in discussions about systems of oppression, including the role of past and present public policy in perpetuating cycles of disadvantage and social inequality. This intersectional element was expected to promote political engagement and greater understanding of inequality.

Culturally inclusive teaching (i.e., Banks, 1992; Banks, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002) and intersectional political science pedagogy are designed to stimulate productive dialogue, integrate personal narrative, experiences of students (or people they know), and can build meaningful connections that contribute to an inclusive learning environment (Rasmussen, 2014). Recognizing these challenges and recommendations, the experimental section was designed to facilitate Introduction to American Public Policy through the lens of intersectional political science pedagogy with a focus on inclusiveness, dialogue, and anti-oppressive pedagogy. We seek to merge two bodies of literature that address teaching and scholarship in intersectionality and cultural inclusion.

For the experimental section, the instructor taught the course by applying an intersectional lens to explore, critique, and analyze substantive public policy areas. They

facilitated the course using a “flipped” classroom structure that required students to read selected course material before class. A flipped classroom allows students to focus on discussion, dialogue, and analysis during class meetings. Additionally, the course introduced an approach to grading and assessing student learning that focused on accessible, inclusive, and anti-oppressive assessment (Also see appendices). By integrating intersectional pedagogy with these enhanced classroom practices, we expect students to have an increased perception of inclusion as well as a willingness to discuss challenging topics.

The pedagogy and instruction in the two sections of Introduction to American Public Policy varied in other meaningful ways. These distinctions represent some of the challenges linked to teaching topics related to diversity in political science. The professor for the experimental group is an African American woman. She is a second-year tenure track faculty member and a first-generation college student. The professor for the control group is an older white male. He is a full professor and taught the control section using conventional public policy course material from the selected course textbook. While discussing the identity of the investigators within the context of a study is somewhat unusual, we think that our identities are salient for several reasons. First, students at predominately white institutions (PWI) may demonstrate discomfort about discussing controversial topics depending on the course material, other demographic contexts, and pedagogical approaches (Bauer & Clancy, 2018). Second, students' sensibilities, assumptions, and ideological perspectives are expected to influence how they perceive and experience the intersections of race and gender. Perceptions of gender and race have relevant consequences for women in academia as these identity categories shape how colleagues and students evaluate teaching (Sampaio, 2006). As discussed in the literature, the extensive range of sensibilities that students may exhibit in response to the presence of women of

color faculty teaching intersectional subject matter is unpredictable, dynamic, and can create significant challenges (Manrique & Manrique, 1999; Phillips, 1997; Sotello et al, 2000; Williams, 1992; Sampaio, 2006).

Therefore, the professor's identity in the experimental section was expected to influence how students interacted with the course material and the instructor. To be sure, we were aware that similar dynamics could occur in the control section. Still, we hypothesized that the professor's identity in the control section would be reflected in student perceptions of privilege, elite status, and expertise. Furthermore, women of color teaching race, gender, and other intersectional topics are seen as a physical embodiment of the subject matter they teach. As previously discussed, this can contribute to relatability and increased dialogue. However, as Sampaio (2006) argues,

“Thus, by embodying such difference, female faculty of color become the focus of dissonance, even before any actual instruction begins. Add to this the complexity and tension surrounding the subject of race and gender politics, and it is reasonable to assume that most students in these classrooms will feel uncomfortable and project that discomfort onto the faculty” (p. 919).

These dynamics frequently influence the scrutiny these faculty encounter within the classroom and when meeting departmental standards for tenure and promotion. Student evaluations of faculty teaching persist as a measure of faculty effectiveness and success. Therefore, students' perceptions at our PWI of intersectional political science pedagogy are relevant for advancing scholarship, pedagogical practice, and understanding how students perceive instruction from women of color. The cultural inclusion (Banks, 1992; Banks, 1993; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002) and empathetic pedagogy literature suggests (Bauer & Clancy, 2018) that teaching strategies designed to increase students' comfort with engaging in

difficult discussions when examining controversial topics may help faculty members overcome some of these challenges.

Rasmussen (2014) presents a number of other potential obstacles related to utilizing intersectional political science pedagogy. The author includes recommendations for overcoming challenges linked to the complexity of intersectional course content. For instance, he focuses on how to help students understand multiple intersecting identities and social locations and how each aspect of the theory impacts experiences of privilege and marginalization based on race, gender, class, and other identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Rasmussen, 2014). Student resistance, the need to remain contemporary, and increased use of engaged and critical pedagogy are among the obstacles Rasmussen (2014) identifies. We found these recommendations instructive in the development of our courses and the planning of our research. The increased use of engaged and critical pedagogy was integrated throughout the experimental section. The course was taught using anti-oppressive pedagogy, foregrounding student engagement, personal narratives, and critical thinking. The pedagogical approach integrated student discussion and is based on Socratic student-centered learning to encourage increased engagement and discourse. The course challenges students to share diverse perspectives and real-life experiences to think critically about public policy (Berge, 1995). Critical pedagogy and increased student knowledge are expected to increase cultural awareness (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Gay, 2002) and commitment to equality (Huerta & Jozwiak, 2008; Dill, 2009; Rasmussen, 2014). We predict that intersectional political science pedagogy would contribute to increased student interest in public policy. On the other hand, as other scholars have indicated, countervailing evidence suggests that increased knowledge about the political system may decrease student interest in politics and public policy.

Centellas and Rosenblatt (2018) examined political efficacy among undergraduate students enrolled in an introductory political science course at a highly engaged research institution. They found no significant political efficacy gap at the course's beginning, and surprisingly, there was a considerable efficacy gap based on race at the end of the course. These findings suggest that increased political literary and civic education decreased political efficacy, "an individual's belief that he or she can affect political change" among black students (Centellas & Rosenblatt, 2018, p. 641). The literature suggests that intersectional political science pedagogy may present numerous challenges for instructors to consider and overcome. However, as Rasmussen (2014) discussed, utilizing pedagogies that incorporate personal experiences and narratives within teaching and instruction may reduce isolation and build bridges between students and instructors (hooks, 1994). Overcoming challenges linked to potentially discouraging students that identify with groups historically targeted for exclusion and marginalization requires utilizing strategies for social bonds, empowerment, and presenting opportunities for students to remain engaged if they desire to do so.

Methodology

In both sections, lectures, discussions, and assignments often revolved around readings from two popular textbooks used in introductory American politics and policy courses – Thomas Dye's *Understanding Public Policy* (Dye 2017) and Barbour and Wright's *Keeping the Republic* (Barbour and Wright 2018). Assignments and assessments focused on material from these books were the same in both classes. These included reflection papers where students chose topics that most interested them and wrote a short description of how the issue fits into their understanding of public policy. A midterm and final exam, consisting of multiple-choice questions (taken from the publisher's text banks), were administered to students in both sections, allowing us to

compare how well students learned the traditional introductory topics such as congress, the media, the bureaucracy, and policy-making models. Whereas in the control section, students were only assigned readings from these two primary textbooks, in the experimental section, students were exposed to a wide variety of intersectional topics. The two groups were randomly assigned because students who enrolled in the course did not know that each section would be taught differently. At the end of the semester, students were given a survey of twenty-five questions asking them to share basic demographic information along with their opinions on several topics related to the course.

We developed a survey instrument to measure the impact of whether an intersectional approach in several key areas (See appendices). First, we wish to determine whether such an approach leads to greater interest, enthusiasm, and understanding of American government and public policy topics. In addition, we are interested in whether this approach impacts students' classroom experience, especially when it comes to participation in class discussions. Finally, we test if intersectional pedagogy leads to a greater understanding of racial and economic inequality.

To assess whether students felt they learned valuable skills and knowledge about politics and public policy when enrolled in an intersectionality-steeped course, we asked the following:

- *I learned to apply course material to improve my thinking, problem-solving, and decisions in the areas of politics and public policy.*
- *I learned to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.*
- *How interested are you in learning more about politics and public policy?*

To measure students' comfort level in participating in class discussions, we asked

- *Thinking about your own performance in POSC 103 this semester, how did you feel about speaking up in class and participating in discussions?*
- *As you understand the term, do you consider yourself to be "woke"?*

- *Is wokeness helping the country evolve and develop for the better or is it stoking differences and causing too much political unrest?*
- *Thinking about inclusion (all students have access to learning and classroom engagement; acceptance, understanding of diversity/difference) in POSC 103 this semester, do you feel that the instructor promoted an inclusive learning environment?*

Our measures of students' views on race and inequality include:

- *How much progress, if any, do you think the country has made over the last 50 years toward ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds?*
- *In general, how much do white people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have?*

Comparing the Experimental and Control Sections

As indicated in Table 1, students in both sections are similar in most categories, including class rank, grade point average, race, political ideology, and family income. Regarding gender and major, there are significant differences between the two sections. 58% of students in the experimental group identify as females, and only 27% do so in the control group. Moreover, the experimental group has 58% of students whose major is something other than political science, while in the control group, a large majority, or 68% of students, are political science majors. Among the nonmajors in both sections, the largest category was students majoring in math and science-related disciplines.

Table 1. Student Demographics

Underclass	0.68	0.70
Upperclass	0.38	0.27
1.9-2.5	0.08	0.32

2.6-3.0	0.08	0.09
3.1-4.0	0.46	0.32
Political Science major	0.33	0.68
Other major	0.58	0.32
Male	0.42	0.64
Female	0.58	0.27
Non-White	0.38	0.23
White	0.63	0.77
Liberal	0.42	0.45
Moderate	0.46	0.36
Conservative	0.13	0.18
Low Income	0.21	0.14
Middle Income	0.25	0.18
High Income	0.54	0.68
N =	24	22

Findings

Student Perceptions of Interest and Learning Skills

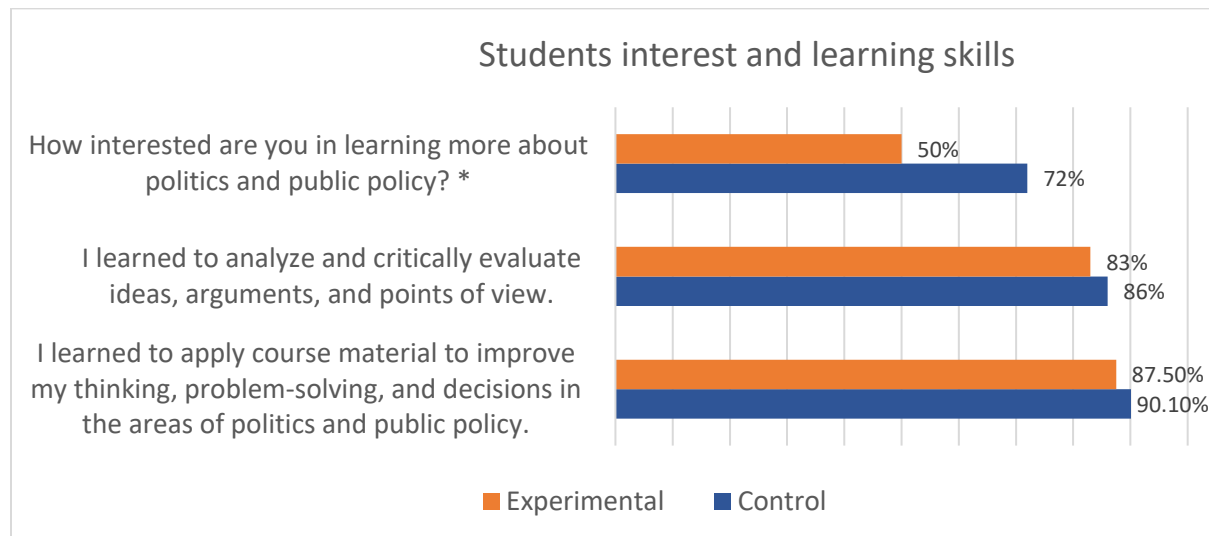
Regarding students' perception of how much they learned in POSC 103, in two of the three survey questions, students in both sections had similar responses. At first, we were somewhat surprised that student interest in learning more about politics and public policy was statistically significant and greater in the control section than in the experimental sections. As

shown in Table 2, 72% of students in the control section indicated they were very interested in learning more, compared to 50% of students in the experimental section. However, controlling for major, we realized that much of this effect is due to the larger number of non-political science majors in the experimental section. The non-majors enrolled in the experimental section reported a less interest in the subject matter and were also frequently less willing to engage in class discussions. This is consistent with research that found that introductory political science courses limited to major students can produce superior learning outcomes (McGovern & Yacobucci, 2021).

In addition to being an introductory course, POSC103 is tagged as a university-wide General Education course. This presents an excellent opportunity for students from other majors to learn about politics and public policy from an intersectional perspective. However, it also broadens the universe for the previously discussed challenges to influence the classroom experience for all students. Non-majors who have not interacted with Black women professors, much less a professor teaching intersectional pedagogy, may demonstrate heightened resistance and lack of interest. The professor for the experimental section experienced demonstrations of resistance, displeasure, intimidation, and other rude behaviors (Sampaio, 2006). Even during a scheduled library workshop where the professor was not present, similar adverse behavior among some students in the class, occurred. The purpose of these workshops is for a social science librarian to teach students about the resources and databases used by political scientists to conduct research and how they can access these tools for their paper projects. The library liaison is not associated with the course, but in the absence of the professor this instructor encountered similar negative behaviors from students enrolled in the course, especially when it came to research for a number of intersectional topics. The findings in previous studies, the

literature examining the experiences of women in higher education, and the data collected for this study suggest that non-major status may explain our results regarding student perceptions of learning public policy using intersectional political science pedagogy.

Table 2. Student Interest and Perceived Learning Skills



*Pearson Chi-Square < .05

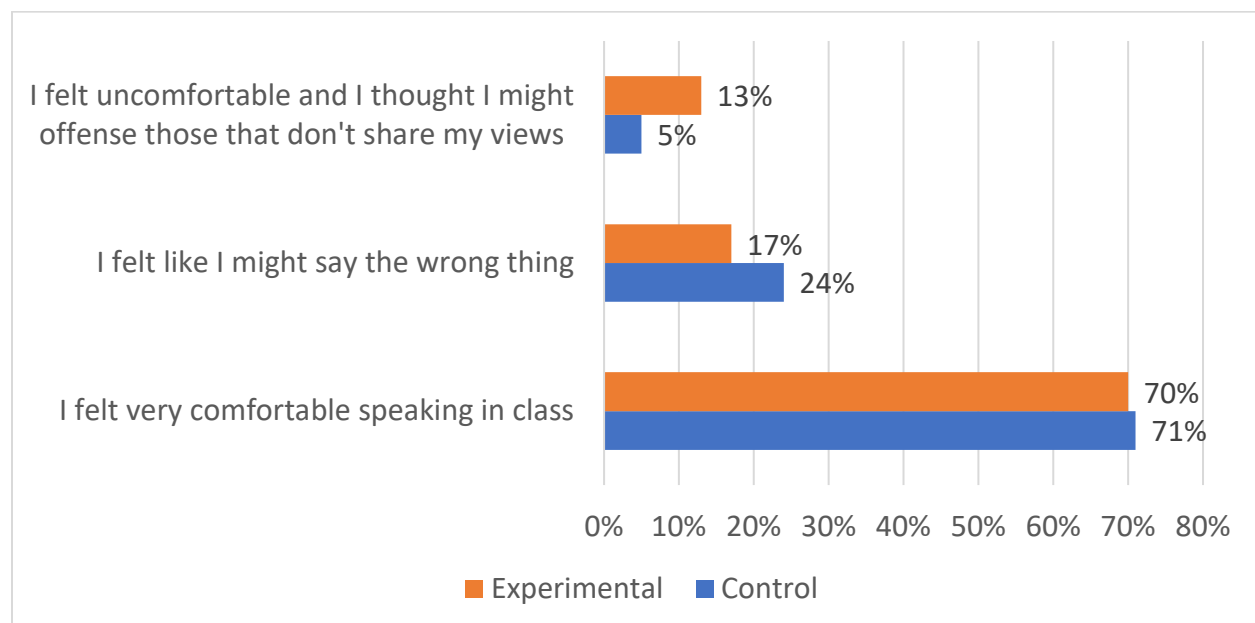
Students' Comfort Level in the Classroom

We were also interested in finding out how comfortable and willing students were to engage the class by participating in class discussions. The backlash against examining these topics in education and politics can lessen the willingness to engage in dialogue and discuss intersectional topics. Additionally, students at our institution, like other PWIs, may be reluctant to discuss race, gender, class, and inequality in the classroom (Bauer & Clancy, 2018). Students enrolled in the experimental section examined a broad range of issues including: What is Intersectional Public Policy, Native Removal & the Federal Boarding School Initiative, Immigration & Racial Restriction in Citizenship Law, Interactive Timelines: BLM & Immigration, African American Inequality, The Politics of Disenfranchisement, Civil Rights, Social Movements & Activism, and Criminal Justice. None of these topics were covered in the

control section, as the class focused on the standard textbook topics in an introductory course in American public policy (public policy models, agenda setting, political institutions and behavior, etc.).

Despite these differences, most students in both sections indicated they were very comfortable speaking in class. Despite the controversial and often divisive topics, the lack of discomfort in the experimental section was likely due to another key difference in the two classes – the use of anti-oppressive pedagogy. This may have had the effect of mitigating students' feelings of discomfort or worry about saying the wrong thing (Bauer & Clancy, 2018). It is important to realize that anti-oppressive pedagogy is also anti-racist. It requires the instructor to engage in continual self-reflection and interrogation of bias (Kishimoto, 2018). It requires increased communication with students to ensure they understand the process and evaluations of their performance. These practices may be able to mitigate the effects of discomfort and fear among students in the experimental section.

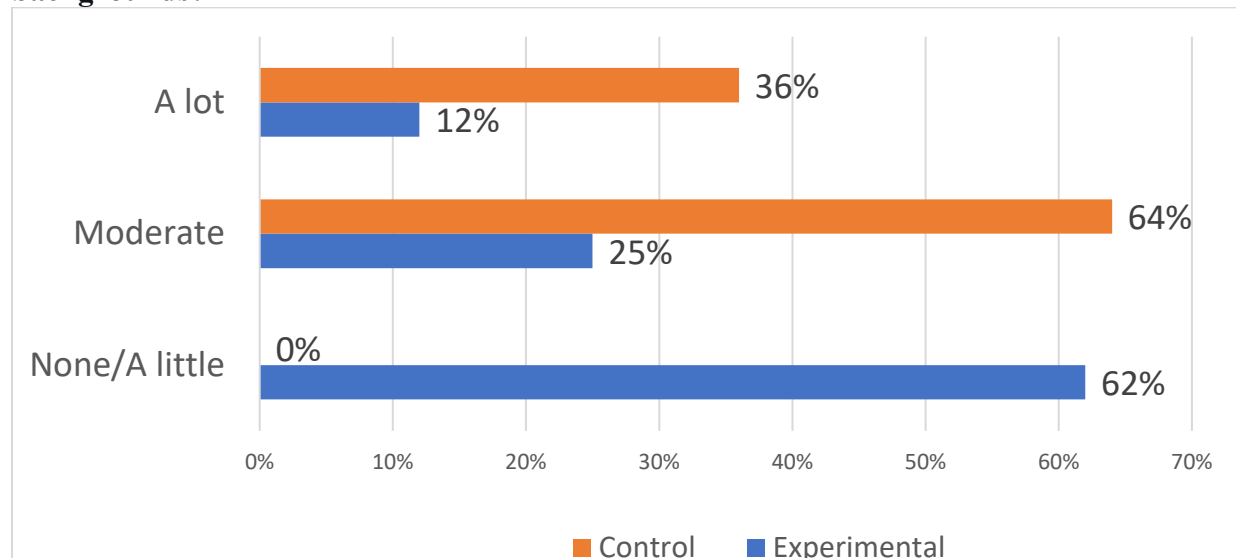
Table 3. Student Comfort Level in Class Participation



Students' Understanding of Racial Progress and White Privilege

Perhaps even more critical for our research is understanding the impact that an intersectional approach has on students' understanding and feelings about racial disparities and racial progress in America. After spending a semester being exposed to a variety of intersectional topics, many of which emphasized the painfully slow policy process that characterizes racial progress in America, a significant majority of students in the experimental section came away from the class with the belief that "none or only a little" progress has been made when it comes to equal rights for Americans regardless of racial or ethnic backgrounds. In the control class, which rarely covered topics of race related to intersectionality, focusing instead on the more traditional and somewhat whitewashed traditional American public policy topics, 90% of students felt that a lot or a moderate amount of progress toward equal rights had occurred over the last fifty years. There was a statistically significant relationship between the two sections. The students enrolled in the experimental section learned about disparities in public policy that result in the racial feminization of poverty, mass incarceration, voter suppression, and Immigration. As previously discussed, effectively integrated intersectional political science pedagogy elevates four key themes: a focus on multiple identities, power and process, inclusion, and a normative commitment to equality (Rasmussen 2014). The results suggest that the topics examined in the experimental course effectively integrated the central themes of intersectional political science pedagogy, leading to students' deeper understanding of systems of oppression, inequality, and other contemporary challenges in public policy.

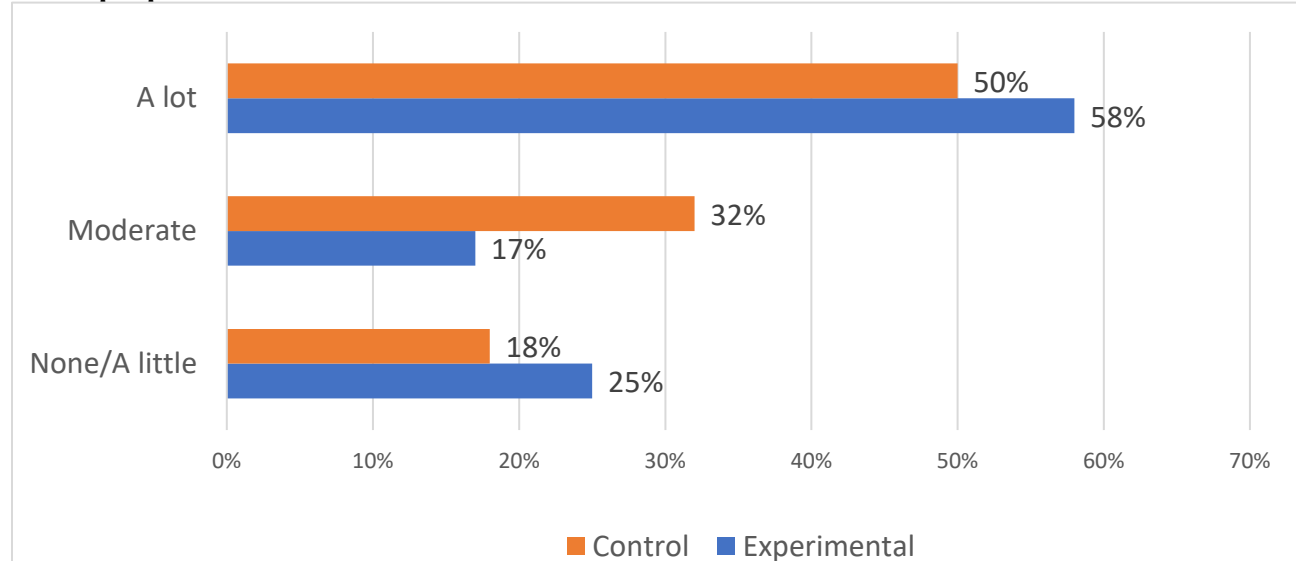
Table 4. How much progress, if any, do you think the country has made over the last 50 years toward ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds? *



*Pearson Chi-Square < .05

Finally, on another question measuring feelings about race and race relations, there was only a slight difference in the two sections when students were asked whether white people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have. While a slightly larger percentage of students in the experimental section provided the strongest affirmative answer (white people benefit a lot), 25% of the class indicated the opposite, as they felt that white benefit in society does not really exist. Given the sharp political polarization, which often characterizes the issue of white privilege or advantage, it came as no surprise that when controlling for political ideology, we observed that in both sections, all the students who answered "none/a little" identified as conservative or moderate.

Table 5. In general, how much do white people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have?



Conclusion

Our preliminary research suggests a number of important strategies for integrating intersectional political science pedagogy in an inclusive, and engaging manner. The experimental group presented many of the pedagogical challenges recognized throughout the education literature. Race, gender, class, inequality and other topics, when taught by women of color, stimulate classroom interactions, resistance, and student perceptions of instruction that differed from the experiences of a white male professor. However, we found that teaching political science and public policy using intersectional pedagogy may be more effective, if inclusive, anti-oppressive practices are combined with an intersectional approach. We recommend discussing intersectional pedagogy early and make it part of the course by introducing students to key themes, concepts, and terms. It is important to discuss the purpose of the approach, how it will enhance the learning experience, and promote increased engagement. Importantly, the professor for the experimental group focused on transparency, and feedback throughout the semester. This

was valued and appreciated by some students, as reflected in open-ended responses in course evaluations administered to all political science courses at the end of the semester.

While there were not tremendous differences between the two sections in many of our measures, in the future, we plan on replicating this experiment with a larger sample size as well as the addition of a pre-test. Our preliminary study did reveal large and statistically significant differences between the two sections when we asked students about racial progress. It is clear, that in the experimental section, students developed a deeper understanding of the public policy process and how systems of oppression impact the lives of people every day. The challenge for political science educators, especially those that teach all courses in American government and politics, is to continue to overcome the barriers that contribute to discomfort, skepticism, resistance, and lack of engagement.

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APPENDIX

Anti-racist and Anti-oppressive student handout.

Introduction to American Public Policy

POSC103-002 is a political science course that examines public policy in American politics. Students will learn to contextualize the impact of intersectional dynamics in American public policy. I teach the course applying an intersectional lens to explore, critique, and analyze substantive public policy areas. I use a “flipped” classroom structure that requires students to read and watch course material before class. A flipped classroom allows students to focus on discussion, dialogue, and analysis during class meetings. Additionally, the course introduces an approach to grading and assessing student learning that is accessible, inclusive, and anti-racist. In this course, students must complete specified course requirements; however, they can select other assignments to obtain the grades they seek in the course.

How flexible assessment works. Each student in the class is required to complete each of the following:

1. **At least one (1) course exam:** The exam can be the mid-term or the final exam.
2. Because of the structure of the course, there are no make-up exams. If you miss an exam, you can earn points by completing other assignments or an essay prompt.
3. To receive credit for any assignment in the course, you must earn a passing grade. For example, you decide to complete a paper to earn points in the class instead of taking an exam. Your assignment grade must be **above an F (60%) to receive any points for the assignment**. The policy will ensure that all students are engaged, learners. No student will submit a limitless number of failing papers and receive a passing grade in the course. Increased flexibility will not lead to decreased academic standards in this course.
4. **Political Engagement Papers (3)**
5. **Reflection Papers (3)**
6. **Final Paper**

Q: Does this mean that the rigor of my education will suffer to accommodate “others”?

A: No. The overall structure and framework of the course are very similar to other courses. Anti-oppressive and accessible instruction allows students that do not need increased flexibility to complete the course without completing the optional work. Think of it this way. Extra credit opportunities are provided in many classes so students can improve their grades. The assessment strategy utilized in this course creates similar opportunities. Allowing students to trade out or replace an assignment by completing writing assignments based on their preferences.

Q: What does this mean?

A: Students can complete coursework that they find interesting, valuable, and enriching. The goal is for each student to demonstrate learning by completing assignments suitable to their learning style, skills, abilities, and availability. Students may find that learning in this course is more accessible. Students with disabilities, mental health conditions, children, odd work hours, or other concerns have more flexibility and opportunities to succeed in the course. The intentionality and reflection required to practice anti-racist and accessible education contribute to inclusive learning spaces for all students.

Q: What does this practice require from your instructor?

A: Anti-racist pedagogy requires the instructor to continually self-reflect and interrogate bias. The practice should guide their teaching, interactions with members of the community, and decisions about course development. It also requires increased communication with students to ensure they understand the process and evaluation of their performance.

Survey Instrument

1. Who was your professor this semester for POSC 103?
 - a. Dr. Fletcher
 - b. Dr. Hoffman
2. What is the highest degree obtained by either parent?
 - a. High school diploma
 - b. Associates (Community College)
 - c. Bachelor's
 - d. Master's
 - e. Doctorate
3. The course contributed to developing my knowledge and understanding of diverse perspectives, global awareness, and other cultures.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
4. Did your instructor seek to provide inclusive instruction incorporating your Disability Resource Center (DRC) support and testing accommodations for POSC103?
 - a. Yes
 - b. No
 - c. Decline
 - d. N/A Not applicable
5. I learned to apply course material to improve my thinking, problem-solving, and decisions in the areas of politics and public policy
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
6. I learned to analyze and critically evaluate ideas, arguments, and points of view.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
7. I learned to apply knowledge and skills to benefit others or serve the public good through political engagement and participation.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree

- c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
8. What is your current academic year?
- a. Freshman
 - b. Sophomore
 - c. Junior
 - d. Senior
9. What is your current Grade Point Average (GPA)?
- a. 1.9 or below
 - b. 2.0 – 2.5
 - c. 2.6 – 3.0
 - d. 3.1- 3.5
 - e. 3.6 or above
 - f. First semester at SU
10. What is your major and minor?
11. How would you describe your political views?
- a. Very liberal
 - b. Liberal
 - c. Moderate
 - d. Conservative
 - e. Very conservative
12. What political party do you most identify with?
- a. Republican
 - b. Democrat
 - c. Other _____
 - d. None
13. What gender do you identify as?
- a. Male
 - b. Female
 - c. Write-in gender _____
 - d. Prefer not to say
14. How would you describe yourself?
- a. American Indian or Alaska Native
 - b. Asian
 - c. Black or African American
 - d. Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
 - e. White
 - f. Spanish/Hispanic/Latinx

- g. Write in description _____
15. What category best describes your family income?
- a. Less than \$24,999
 - b. \$25,000 - \$49,000
 - c. \$50,000 - \$74,999
 - d. \$75,000 - \$99,999
 - e. \$100,000 - \$149,999
 - f. \$150,000 - \$199,999
 - g. \$200,000 or more
16. I feel confident that I understand what public policy is, and how it works in American politics after taking this course.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
17. My instructor was open to criticism of their own ideas.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
18. My Instructor discussed points of view other than their own.
- a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly disagree
19. How much progress, if any, do you think the country has made over the last 50 years toward ensuring equal rights for all Americans regardless of their racial or ethnic backgrounds?
- a. None at all
 - b. A little
 - c. A moderate amount
 - d. A lot
 - e. A great deal
20. In general, how much do white people benefit from advantages in society that Black people do not have?
- a. None at all
 - b. A little
 - c. A moderate amount

- d. A lot
 - e. A great deal
21. How interested are you in learning more about politics and public policy?
- a. Very interested
 - b. interested
 - c. Moderately interested
 - d. Not very interested
 - e. Not at all interested
22. Thinking about intersectionality (the intersection of race, class, and gender), what role if any do you think this should play in an introductory course in American public policy?
- a. A very large role
 - b. A large role
 - c. A moderate role
 - d. A small role
 - e. No role at all
23. Thinking about inclusion (all students have access to learning and classroom engagement; acceptance, understanding of diversity/difference) in POSC 103 this semester, do you feel that the instructor promoted an inclusive learning environment?
- a. Very inclusive
 - b. Inclusive
 - c. Somewhat inclusive
 - d. Not very inclusive
 - e. Not at all inclusive
24. Thinking about your own performance in POSC 103 this semester, how did you feel about speaking up in class and participating in discussions? Please mark the choice that comes closest to your view.
- a. I felt very comfortable
 - b. I felt somewhat comfortable
 - c. I felt like I might say the wrong thing
 - d. I felt uncomfortable and I thought I might offend those that don't share my views
25. Political efficacy is defined as having a belief that you can make your voice heard in politics and that policymakers are listening to you. How would you describe your own level of political efficacy?
- a. Very efficacious
 - b. Somewhat efficacious
 - c. Moderately efficacious
 - d. Not very efficacious
 - e. Not at all efficacious
26. As you understand the term, do you consider yourself to be "woke"?
- a. Yes

- b. No
- c. Unsure
- d. I don't know what "woke" means

27. Is wokeness helping the country evolve and develop for the better or is it stoking differences and causing too much political unrest?

- a. Helping the country evolve for the better
- b. Stoking differences and causing too much political unrest

28. Do you have any other comments, observations or criticisms of POSC 103 this semester?